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MY DAILY MEDITATION for the Circling Year

by John Henry Jowett

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER The First

THE VIRTUE OF PROPORTION

Matthew 6:25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34.

I MUST put first things first. The radical fault in much of my living is want of proportion. I think more of pretty window curtains than of fresh air, more of "nice" wallpaper than of the moving pageant of the skies. I magnify the immediate desire and minimize the ultimate goal. And so "things do not come right!" How can they when the apportionment is so perverse, when everything is topsy-turvy? If I want things to be firm and durable I must revere the Divine order, and must put first things first. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Mt 6:33-note

And, therefore, I must **seek holiness** before **success**.

I am to esteem **holiness with apparent failure** as infinitely better than **success with stain and shame**.

I must seek **character** before **reputation**.

The **applause** of the world must be as nothing compared with the **approbation** of God.

The favoring "**voice from heaven**" must be sweeter to my ears than the **noisy cheers of the crowd**.

And I must seek righteousness before quietness. The way of disturbance is sometimes the way to peace. I must not be so concerned for a quiet life as for a life that is "right with God."

SEPTEMBER The Second

PRAYER AND REVOLUTION

John 4:43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54.

THIS miracle began in a prayer. The nobleman went unto Jesus "and besought Him." In such apparently fragile things can mighty revolutions be born! "Prayer," said Tennyson, "opens the sluice-gates between us and the Infinite." It brings the frail wire into contact with the battery. It links together man and God.

Prayer was corroborated by belief. "The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him." By our faith we cut the channels along which the healing energy will flow. Faith "prepares the way of the Lord." Our faith is purposed to be a fellow-laborer with grace, and, if faith be absent, grace "can do no mighty works."

The healing begins with the faith. "It was at the same hour in which ... he himself believed." These "coincidences" are inevitable happenings in the realm of the Spirit. When we offer the believing prayer, God's mighty energies begin to besiege the life for which the prayer is made. Mr. Cornaby, the Methodist missionary, declares how conscious he is in far-away China when someone is

interceding for him in the home-land! The power possesses him in vitalizing flood! Hudson Taylor's mother shuts herself in a little room to pray, and eighty miles away her son is converted.

SEPTEMBER The Third

MY SHARE IN THE MIRACLE

John 2:1, 3, 4,5, 6,7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

OUR Lord always demands our best. He will not work with our second-best. His gracious "extra" is given when our own resources are exhausted. We must do our best before our Master will do His miracle. We must "fill the water-pots with water"! We must bring "the five loaves and two fishes"! We must "let down the net"! We must be willing "to be made whole," and we must make the effort to rise! Yes, the Lord will have my best.

Our Lord transforms our best into His better. He changes water into wine. He turns the handful of seed into a harvest. Our aspirations become inspirations. Our willings become magnetic with the mystic power of grace. Our bread becomes sacramental, and He Himself is revealed to us at the feast. Our ordinary converse becomes a Divine fellowship, and "our hearts burn within us" as He talks to us by the way.

And our Lord ever keeps His best wine until the last. "Greater things than these shall ye do!" "I will see you again," and there shall be grander transformations still! "The best is yet to be." "Dreams cannot picture a world so fair." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

SEPTEMBER The Fourth

A PORTRAIT OF A GREAT SUPPLIANT

Matthew 8:5, 6,7,8, 9,10, 11,12, 13.

HERE we have the grace of sympathy; one man troubled about the sickness of another. We are drawing very near to the Lord when our soul vibrates responsively to another man's need. We can measure our likeness to the Lord by the range of our sensitiveness to the world's sorrow and pain. Our God is the "Father of pities"; He is sensitive in every direction, no side is numb, and we are putting on His likeness in proportion as we attain an all-round responsiveness to the cries of human need.

And here we have the grace of humility. "I am not worthy!" Our pride always blocks "the way of the Lord." Our humility makes us porous to the Divine. The "poor in spirit" are already in the kingdom, and the gracious powers of the kingdom are commanded to attend their bidding.

And here we have the grace of faith. "Only say the word!" The centurion conceives the Lord's words as soldiers attending on the Lord's will. Let one be spoken, and at once the mission is executed. And so it is. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." His words are vehicles of power, and when they are spoken, miracles are always wrought. "The entrance of Thy word giveth light."

SEPTEMBER The Fifth

FAITH AND RIDICULE

Matthew 9:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26.

AND, so one man's faith is more than a match for many people's scorn. The steady trust of the ruler was not shaken by the rude flippancy of the artificial mourners, and his daughter was brought from the dead. "This is the victory that overcometh, even our faith." Everything bows, like fragile reeds, before the march of a victorious faith. Scorn, and hatred, and all manner of devilry, and death itself, all lose their power in the presence of a belief which remains steady and steadfast. "Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

And what an infinite reservoir of power is waiting to be tapped by the hand of faith! A ruler believes and his daughter is vitalized. A poor woman, bent and broken, reaches out her thin, frail hand, and lo! she is erect and graceful as the pine! And "my sufficiency is of God!" All that I may need is in the same wonderful reservoir of grace. That healing flood is like the ocean fulness, and it will fill every bay, and cove, and creek in the wide-stretching shore of human need.

"The healing of His seamless dress

Is by our beds of pain,

We touch Him in life's throng and press,

And we are whole again.”

SEPTEMBER The Sixth

CONTEMPTUOUS WORDS

Matthew 15:21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

I WONDER if this word “dogs” was my Saviour’s word, or had He picked it up from the disciples that He might cast it away again for ever? Did He use it that He might reveal its ugliness, and so banish it from human speech? As Jesus and His disciples came along the road the Master walked before them. “And behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders!” And the disciples whispered to one another, “Here comes one of the dogs!” And the Master overheard it, and His tender spirit grieved. And there and then He resolved to help the woman and at the same time cleanse the men.

Is there not therefore something half-ironical in our Saviour’s use of the word? When He spake of the woman as a “dog,” and of the disciples as “the children,” would there not be something significant in His very looks and tones? These cold, unfeeling men “the children,” and this tender yearning woman the “dog”!

When the Lord used the disciples’ word they began to be ashamed, and in the fire of their shame their self-conceit was consumed. He turned with impatient longing to the woman, “O, woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”

SEPTEMBER The Seventh

EXPERIMENT AND EXPERIENCE

Hebrews 11:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

I LIKE the marginal rendering of the introductory sentence of this great chapter. “Faith is the giving substance to things hoped for.” Faith converts cloudy castles into substantial homes. Faith substantiates the unseen. Faith sucks the energy out of splendid ideals, and incorporates it in present and immediate life. Faith unfolds the eternal in the moment, the infinite in the trifle, the divine in the commonplace. Faith incorporates God and man. Yes, faith gives substance to “things hoped for,” it brings them out of the air, and gives them reality and movement in the hard and common ways of earth and time.

And faith is also “the test of things not seen.” By a test faith gains a conquest. By an experiment faith acquires an experience. By a great speculation faith makes a great discovery. “Try me now herewith, and prove Me!” It is an invitation to humble and sincere assumption. Try if it works! Make a hallowed experiment with the powers of grace.

Lord, incline me to make the gracious test! Let me stake my all upon the venture! Let me dare all in order that I may gain all! Let me sow bountifully, and so reap a bountiful harvest.

SEPTEMBER The Eighth

THE BRACING AIR OF PUBLICITY

Romans 10:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

THERE is a belief which never registers itself in confession. It never exercises itself in the strong, bracing air of publicity. It is a cloistered belief, and suffers from want of ventilation. Such Christians are always anæmic; indeed, they are always puny, and never get beyond the stage of spiritual babyhood. “Ye are yet babes!” Belief which is never oxygenated by open confession can never nourish the soul into vigorous and exhilarant health.

But there is a belief which expresses and confirms itself in confession. “With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Such confession is a means of moral and spiritual health. And confession in the early days meant risk, venture which exposed the life to the shedding of blood. It meant a frank defiance of the world, and an eager challenge of the devil. And it is on such fields of open encounter for the Lord that muscle is made, and the soul goes “from strength to strength,” and “from glory to glory.”

My soul, art thou secretly ashamed of thy Lord? Art thou afraid to “lift high His royal banner”? Then thou wilt always be as a feather-bed soldier, and the trophies of the honourable war are not for thee. Stand out in the open, and boldly testify, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”

SEPTEMBER The Ninth

DEALING WITH SIN

Psalm 32:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,9, 10, 11

HERE is the burden of unconfessed sin. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old." There is nothing brings on premature age like secret sin. It keeps the mind in perpetual unrest, and a troubled mind soon makes the body old. The real nourisher of the body is a quiet and radiant soul. But let the soul be in chaos, and the body will soon be a ruin.

And here, too, is the healthy act of confession. "I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid." He retained no single germ of the whole unclean brood. He brought them out into the light one by one, as though he were emptying a noisome kennel. He brought them out, and named them, in the awful Presence of the Lord.

And here is the ministry of forgiveness, and therefore the miracle of restored health. Let me mark the rich variety of the descriptive words. "Forgiven!" "Covered!" "Imputed not!" It is all removed and obliterated, and the place of defilement and profanity becomes the holy temple of the Lord.

SEPTEMBER The Tenth

CRITICISM AND PIETY

"Thinkest thou, that judgest them that do such things, that thou shalt escape?"

—Romans 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

THAT is always my peril, to assume that by being severe with others I exculpate myself. I go on to the bench, and deliver sentence upon my brother, when my proper place is in the dock. And this is the subtlety of the snare, that I regard my criticisms and condemnations of other people as signs of my own innocence. This is the last refinement in temptation, and multitudes fall before its power.

The way to moral and spiritual health is to direct my criticisms upon myself. I must stand in the dock, and hear the grave indictment of my own soul. Unless I pass through the second chapter of Romans I can never enter the fifth and sixth, and still less the glorious forgiveness of the eighth. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." I pass into that warm, cheery light through the cold road of acknowledged guilt and sin.

"If we confess our sins He is just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

SEPTEMBER The Eleventh

A FATAL DIVORCE

"They feared the Lord, and served their own gods."

—2Kings 17:24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34.

AND that is an old-world record, but it is quite a modern experience. The kinsmen of these ancient people are found in our own time. Men still fear one God and serve another.

But something is vitally wrong when men can divorce their fear from their obedience. And the beginning of the wrong is in the fear itself. "Fear," as used in this passage, is a counterfeit coin, which does not ring true to the truth. It means only the payment of outward respect, a formal recognition, a passing nod which we give on the way to something better. It is a mere skin courtesy behind which there is no beating heart; a hollow convention in which there is no deep and sacred awe.

But the real "fear of God" is a spiritual mood in which virtue thrives, an atmosphere in which holy living is quite inevitable. "The fear of the Lord is clean." It is not lip-worship, but heart-homage, a reverence in which the soul is always found upon its knees. And so "the fear of the Lord is to hate evil"; it is an indignant repulsion from all that is hateful to God. It is the sharing of the Spirit of the Lord. There cannot be any true fear where the soul does not worship "in spirit and in truth."

SEPTEMBER The Twelfth

THE GARMENTS OF THE SOUL

Joel 2:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19.

I AM so apt to think that the rending of an outer garment is a token of true penitence and amendment of life. But it is the inner garments I must deal with, the raiments and habits of the soul. Some of these robes—such as vanity and pride—are as gay and showy as a peacock; others are dirty and leprous, and we should not dare to bring them to the door, and display them in the light.

But all need severe treatment; they must be torn, fibre from fibre, and reduced to rags.

But “rending” must be accompanied by “turning.” “Turn unto the Lord your God.” For the Lord our God is gracious, and His love will not only provide a new wardrobe, but a swift furnace in which to burn the remnants of the old. Yes, His “great kindness” will burn away the filth of my alienation, and will “bring forth the best robe” and put it on me. The good Lord will give me new habits. He will “cover me with the robe of righteousness, and the garment of salvation.”

SEPTEMBER The Thirteenth

THE CLEAN HEART

Psalm 51:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

WHAT will the Lord do with my sin, if in true humility I come into His Presence? Let me hear the music of the evangel.

He will “blot out my transgression.” He will so erase it that even His own holy eyes can see no stain or shame. He will blot it out, as I have seen a gloomy cloudlet blotted out, and there has been nothing left but radiant sky.

And He will “wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity.” Yes, and that not like the washing of the hands, but like the washing of clothes, not like the washing of a surface, but the removal of uncleanness from a fabric, the ousting of every germ lurking in the innermost cells of the stuff. When the Lord washes a soul it is “thoroughly” done, and every strand is white in holiness.

So will He give me “a clean heart”; so will He “renew a right spirit within me.” The very atmosphere of my life shall be as the air after deluges of cleansing rain. It shall be sweet, and clean, and clear! I shall walk in a new inspiration, and I shall “behold the land that is very far off.”

SEPTEMBER The Fourteenth

THE SENSE OF WANT

“This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”

—Luke 18:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

THE Master sets the Pharisee and publican in contrast, and His judgment goes against the man who has made some progress in moral attainments, and favours the man who has no victories to show, but only a hunger for victory. The dissatisfied sinner is preferred to the self-satisfied saint. The Pharisee had gained an inch, but had lost his sense of the continent. The publican had not pegged out an inch of moral claim, but he had an overwhelming sense of the untrodden universe.

So this, I think, is the teaching for me. We are justified by the penitent sense of want and not by the boastful sense of possession. Our sense of lack is the measure of our hope, and our measure of hope determines the poverty or fulness of our communion with the Lord. The Pharisee had no “beyond,” no realm of admiration, no hope! Aspiration was dead, and therefore inspiration had ceased. Our possibilities nestle in our cravings.

SEPTEMBER The Fifteenth

RESTORING A RUINED LIFE

Psalm 103:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

COULD there be a sweeter chime than the opening music of this psalm?

“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities.” He receives me back home again, interrupts the broken story of my sin, and drowns my sobbings in His rejoicings.

“Who healeth all thy diseases.” He takes in hand the foul complaints which I acquired in “the far country,” and with His powerful medicines, and His wonderful “bread of life,” He drives the foul things from my soul.

“Who redeemeth thy life from destruction.” Yes, with His own blood He buys me back from a midnight servitude, strikes every chain and shackle from my limbs, and makes me dance in “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

“Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy.” He encircles me with the invulnerable army of His own love. Henceforth if the devil would get at me he must deal with God. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people.”

“Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.” He sets before me a glorious table, and enlivens my spirits with glorious fellowship.

That so I can be no other than “satisfied,” and my heart is at rest in the Lord. “Thou, O Christ, art all I want!”

SEPTEMBER The Sixteenth

THE STEADFASTNESS OF THE LORD

“My covenant shall stand fast.”

—Psalm 139:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

MUCH a divine assurance ought to make me perfectly quiet in spirit. Restlessness in a Christian always spells disloyalty. The uncertainty is born of suspicion. There is a rift in the faith, and the disturbing breath of the devil blows through, and destroys my peace. If I am sure of my great Ally, my heart will not be troubled, neither will it be afraid.

And such a divine assurance ought to make me bold in will and majestic in labour. I ought to be inventive in chivalrous enterprise, and I ought to covet the hardest parts of the field. If the mighty Ally will never fail, I should never be afraid of the marshalled hosts of wickedness. “One with God is in a majority.” “He always wins who sides with God.” “The Lord is on my side, whom shall I fear?”

And such a divine assurance ought to give me a kingly demeanour. The members of the Court acquire a certain stateliness by their lofty fellowship. And, surely, one who walks with God should be characterized by something of the Divine glory, and men should know that his acquaintances are found in the courts of heaven.

SEPTEMBER The Seventeenth

THE NEVER-WITHERING LEAF

Jeremiah 17:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

LET me look at “the blessed man” in the interpreting symbol of this healthy and graceful tree.

The blessed life is a life of vast resource (**Ed: Why is he "blessed"?** Read Je 17:7). “As a tree planted by the waters, and that spreads out her roots by the river.” It is not watered by an occasional shower, it is unceasingly bathed by the vitalizing flood. Its rootlets are always drinking the nutritious waters of grace. The blessed life is planted on the banks of that wonderful river which takes its rise in the great white throne.

And just because of these boundless supplies, the blessed life is undisturbed in times of grave crisis and emergency. “He shall not see (fear) when heat cometh.” He shall be cool when the unblest are hot and fever-stricken. He shall “keep his head” in times of general panic. His powers of endurance shall make the world wonder! He shall “hold out” when everybody else is faint.

So shall there be nothing “sere and yellow” about him. “His leaf shall be green.” His faith, and hope, and love shall remain fresh and beautiful even in “the dark and cloudy day.”

SEPTEMBER The Eighteenth

THE ALL-ROUND DEFENSE

“Thou hast beset me behind.”

—Psalm 139:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

AND that is a defence against the enemies which would attack me in the rear. There is yesterday’s sin, and the guilt which is the companion of yesterday’s sin. They pursue my soul like fierce hounds, but my gracious Lord will come between my pursuers and me. His mighty grace intervenes, and my security is complete.

“Thou hast beset me ... before.” And that is a defence against the enemies which would impede my advance and frighten me out of the heavenly way. There is fear—fear of the morrow, fear of consequences, fear of death! And my Lord will come between me and them, and their menace shall be destroyed. The fiery darts shall be quenched before they reach my soul.

“And laid Thine hand upon me.” And that is a defence against the enemies which may lie in ambush in present and immediate circumstances: the sudden temptation to passion, or the temptation to panic, or the temptation which would snare me to criminal ease. But my Lord’s hand is all-sufficient! And so on every side my defence standeth; “the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.”

SEPTEMBER The Nineteenth

THE NEEDS OF THE BODY

John 6:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

THE Lord who came to save His people was sensitive to His people's hunger. In the presence of the supreme need the smaller need was not forgotten. He honoured the body as well as the soul. He ministered to the transient as well as the eternal. And that is ever the characteristic of true kingliness; it has a kingly way of doing the smaller things. I can measure my own progress toward the throne by my sovereign attention to scruples. "He that is faithful in that which is least, the same also is great."

The Lord is not oppressed by the multitude of His guests. "He Himself knew what He would do." We need not jostle one another for His bounty. We shall not crowd one another out. "There is bread enough and to spare." Even in the material realm this is true, and everybody would have his daily bread if the will of the Lord were done. There is no straitness in the gracious Host! It is the greed of the guests which mars the satisfaction of the feast.

And how careful the Lord of Glory was to "gather up the fragments"! Our infinitely wealthy Lord is not wealthy enough to "throw things away." He cannot afford to waste bread. Can He afford to lose a soul? "He goeth out after that which is lost until He find it"!

SEPTEMBER The Twentieth

THE PATHETIC MULTITUDE

Mark 8:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

MY Lord has "compassion upon the multitude." And (shall I reverently say it?) His compassion was part of His passion. His pity was always costly. It culminated upon Calvary, but it was bleeding all along the road! It was a fellow-feeling with all the pangs and sorrows of the race. And a pity that bleeds is a pity that heals. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed us."

And the multitude is round about us still, and the people are in peril of fainting by the way. There is the multitude of misfortune, the children of disadvantage, who never seem to have come to their own. And there is the multitude of outcasts, the vast army of publicans and sinners. And there are the bewildering multitudes of Africa, and India, and China, and they have "nothing to eat"!

How do I regard them? Do I share the compassion of the Lord? Do I exercise a sensitive and sanctified imagination, and enter somewhat into the pangs of their cravings? My Lord calls for my help. "How many loaves have ye?" "Bring out all you have! Consecrate your entire resources! Put your all upon the altar of sacrifice!" And in reply to the call can I humbly and trustfully say, "O, Lamb of God, I come!"

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-first

LIFE AS BREAD

Mark 8:10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

IT is gracious to know that my Lord is "the Bread of Life," and that I can feed on Him. It is fearful to know that I, too, am bread, and that others are feeding on me. Am I the nutriment of vice or the sustenance of virtue? Am I an evil leaven, like the Pharisees, or a holy leaven like the Lord? When little children feed on my presence do they grow in strength and beauty? Or do they become relaxed and demoralized? Who will feed upon me to-day, and what will be the end of it?

If I would have my life to be as hallowed and hallowing leaven I must regularly feed upon the Bread of Life. If I am sustained by the Lord, I too shall be a sustainer of all who aspire after a true and holy life. My very character will itself become heavenly bread, and men will be nourished by it even when I am unconscious of the ministry. When they have spent a brief hour in my company they will go away refreshed.

"Lord, evermore give us this bread!" So feed us with Thyself that we may share Thy nature. Let "virtue" go forth from us, and let it be as holy bread to all who are heavy-laden, and ready to faint.

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-second

THE HANDFUL OF MEAL

1Kings 17:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

WHAT marvellous "coincidences" are prepared by Providential grace! The poor widow is unconsciously ordained to entertain the prophet! The ravens will be guided to the brook Cherith! "I have commanded them to feed thee there." Our road is full of surprises. We see the frowning, precipitous hill, and we fear it, but when we arrive at its base we find a refreshing spring! The Lord of the way had gone before the pilgrim. "I go to prepare ... for you."

But how strange that a widow with only “a handful of meal” should be “commanded” to offer hospitality! It is once again “the impossible” which is set before us. It would have been a dull commonplace to have fed the prophet from the overflowing larder of the rich man’s palace. But to work from an almost empty cupboard! That is the surprising way of the Lord. He delights to hang great weights on apparently slender wires, to have great events turn on seeming trifles, and to make poverty the minister of “the indescribable riches of Christ.”

The poor widow sacrificed her “handful of meal,” and received an unfailing supply. And this, too, is the way of the Lord.

“Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee,
Repaid a thousand fold will be.”

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-third

THE DEDICATION OF SUBSTANCE

2Kings 4:38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44.

HERE is a man recognizing the sacredness of his substance. He saw the seal of the Lord upon his harvest, and he offered the first-fruits in token of its rightful Owner. Men go wrong when the only name upon their field is their own. “My power, and the strength of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.” It matters nothing what the wealth may be—material substance, mental skill, or business sagacity. It becomes unhallowed power when we attach our own label to it, and erase the name of God.

This man dedicated his substance, and the hunger of his fellows was appeased. That is a great principle in human life. One man’s satisfaction is dependent on another man’s fidelity. His want is to be filled with my fulness. If I am selfish he remains hungry. If I acknowledge “the rights of God,” and therefore “the rights of man,” he has “enough and to spare.” If I hoard my treasure I rob both God and man.

My gracious Lord, remove the scales from my eyes. Help me to be sensitive to the obligations of all wealth. Let my plenty call me to the children of need. Let me acknowledge my stewardship, and be Thy fellow minister in the service of man.

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-fourth

AFTER THE TRIUMPH!

Matthew 14:23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33.

AFTER the great miracle of feeding the multitude our Lord “went up into a mountain to pray.” May we reverently wonder if it was a season of temptation? Did they want to make Him a King? Was our human Lord assailed by “the destruction that wasteth at noonday”? And did He shut Himself up with the Father?

I am so disposed to pray up to my successes, and to cease to pray in them! I remember God in my struggles, I forget Him in my attainments. I hold fellowship with Him on the road, I part company with Him when I arrive. I become a practical atheist in the midst of my successes. My only security is to go up into a mountain apart and pray. Unless I become closeted with God, and see all things in their true colours and proportion, I shall be lifted up in most unholy and destructive pride.

And let me notice that our Lord returned from His privacy with the Father to do even greater miracles still. He had appeased the pangs of hunger; now He appeases the passion of the sea. And so in my degree shall it be with me. If in all my triumphs I remain the humble companion of the Lord, my triumphs shall be repeated and enriched. “Greater works than these shall ye do.”

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-fifth

THE SENSE OF GRACE

Psalms 107:21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.

A VITAL part of all devotion is the remembrance of the goodness of God. Such a remembrance keeps my soul in the realm of grace. I am so inclined to proclaim my personal rights rather than glorify the favour of God, so inclined to exhibit my own prowess rather than God’s most gracious bounty. And whenever I lose the sense of grace I become a usurper and take the throne. Our salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast.”

And such a remembrance would keep my soul in the mood of humility. “Nothing in my hands I bring.” I can no more claim the glory of salvation than a child, who has cut a shallow trench on the sands, can claim the glory of initiating the roll of the ocean-tide. I owe all my desires and all my hopes and all my present attainments to the boundless goodness of God.

And such a remembrance would keep my soul in the dispensation of love. I cannot quietly and steadily contemplate the goodness of the Lord without my soul being kindled into loving response. Without high contemplations love smoulders, and will eventually die out. But God's goodness inflames the soul, and communicates its own most gracious heat. "We love because He first loved us!"

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-sixth

MY LORD AS MY BREAD

John 6:26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

OUR life's bread is a Person. We may have much to do with Christianity and nothing to do with Christ. The other day I was in a great and wonderful bakery, but I never ate nor touched a morsel of bread. I touched the machinery. I was absorbingly interested in the processes, but I ate no bread! And I may be deeply interested in the means of grace, I may be familiar with all "the ins and outs" of ecclesiastical machinery, and I may never handle nor taste "the bread of God." Our religion is dead and burdensome until it becomes a personal relation, and we have vital communion with Christ.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want." We find everything in Him. Everything else is preliminary, preparatory, subordinate, and to be in the long run dropped and forgotten. A ritual is only a way to "the bread," and by no means essential, and very often undesirable. The heart can find the Lord with a look, with a cry, and needs no obtrusion of ritual or priest. But how pathetic! To be contented to potter about among the ritual and never to find the Bread! To be in the house and never to see the Host! "Ye search the Scriptures ... and ye will not come to Me."

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-seventh

TAKE AND EAT

John 6:52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63.

THERE is, first of all, appropriation. I must "stretch out" "lame hands of faith"; and "take" before I "eat." In the lives of many Christians there is too much asking and too little taking. If it were only rightly regarded, prayer is companionship as well as petition, and companionship is literally significant of the sharing of bread. In every season of communion a part must be assigned to the taking of the things for which we have prayed. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

And there is assimilation. We must "eat" as well as "take." It is in the exercises of obedience that we digest and incorporate the bread of life. Without our obedience the living Lord never becomes "part of ourselves." We never "become one in the bundle of life" with the Lord our God. And truth which is not assimilated becomes a drug. Instead of being a "savour of life unto life," it becomes a "savour of death unto death."

And there is vitalization. The assimilated bread of life makes everything alive. Every faculty in my being feels the touch of divine inspiration. It is native bread for native power, and everything is renewed.

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-eighth

THE DAILY MANNA

"I will rain bread from heaven for you."

—Exodus 16:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

AND this gracious provision is made for people who are complaining, and who are sighing for the flesh-pots of Egypt! (Ex 16:3KJV) Our Lord can be patient with the impatient: He can be "kind to the unthankful." If it were easy to drive the Lord away I should have succeeded long ago. I have murmured (Php 2:14-note), I have sulked, I have turned Him out of my thoughts, and "He stands at the door and knocks!" I yearn for "the flesh-pots," "He sends me manna," "Was there ever a shepherd half so gentle, half so sweet?"

"And they gathered it every morning." And that I think is the best time to gather the heavenly food. At night I am weary, my body is craving sleep, and I am not vitalized in the fields of grace. But in the morning I am refreshed, and I can go to the heavenly fields and gather "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1Co 2:9) I can be fed as the day begins, and I can set out to my daily work with the taste of God in my mouth (Job 23:12-note, Ps 34:8, 19:10, 63:5, 119:103), and His mighty grace in my heart (Heb 13:9-note), and I shall delight to "walk in the paths of His commandments." (Ps 119:35)

SEPTEMBER The Twenty-ninth

THE FOUNTAIN

1John 5:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

MY Lord is “the fountain of life.” “This life is in His Son.” The springs are nowhere else—not in elaborate theologies, or in ethical ideals, or in literary masterpieces, or in music or art. “In Him was life.” It is so easy to forget the medicinal spring amid the distractions of the fashionable spa. There are some healing waters at Scarborough, but they have been almost “crowded out” by bands and entertainments. It is possible that the secondary ministries of the Church may crowd out the Church’s Lord. I do not object to the entertainment if only it opens out on to the Spring!

To have the Son is to have life. Nothing else is needed. “Thou, O Christ, art all I want.” Ritualisms, and ecclesiasticisms, and formal theologies are not requisite. We can be saved without an academic knowledge of “the plan of salvation.” Many a gamekeeper’s little child knows all the roads on the estate, although she would be quite “at sea” in explaining “the plan of the estate” which hangs in the house of the steward. “This is life eternal, to know Thee and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

SEPTEMBER The Thirtieth

WHITE ROBES IN THE STREETS

John 17:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

THE man who has been fed with the “bread of life” must remain “in the world.” The Lord gives no countenance to the life of the ascetic. Our sanctification is not to be gained by withdrawal and retreat. At the best, that would be a holiness sickly and anæmic, a coddled virtue devoid of firm muscle and iron nerve. Our Lord purposes a holiness which shall wear white robes in the streets, and shine like virgin snow in the market, and keep itself chivalrous and stately in the common fellowships of men.

“In the world,” but “not of the world.” The man who is fed on “the bread of life” is endowed with powers of resistance against “the noisome pestilence.” The germs of worldly epidemics find no nutriment in him. “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.” When an evil microbe finds no foothold it withers away. If I am not “of the world” I shall quite naturally and instinctively be able to resist “all the wiles of the devil.”

And my Lord purposes me to have this positive, masculine holiness in order “that the world may believe.” He wants disciples who will arrest the world by their glorious health, and by their invincible moral defences. He wants my purity to advertise His grace; He wants my faith to increase “the household of the faith.”